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ABSTRACT

To determine if male junior college students differed in counselor preference by ethnicity and type of problem a stratified random sample of 60 students was drawn: 20 Mexican Americans, 20 Blacks, and 20 Whites. Subjects who were presented with validated counselor photographs representing the three ethnicities then assumed both administrative and personal problem situations and made counselor selections. Significant differences were found in student preference for Mexican American, Black, and White counselors for both problem situations. When provided a choice Mexican American, Black, and White students tended to prefer a counselor of their same ethnicity. In general, students also wanted to speak with a counselor of their same ethnicity more for the personal than the administrative problem situations. The results clearly support the view that counselor ethnicity is perceived by students as a significant variable in counselor selection. (Author)

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MINORITY COUNSELORS: ARE THEY REALLY NEEDED?

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ABSTRACT

To determine if male junior college students differed in counselor preference by ethnicity and type of problem a stratified random sample of 60 students was drawn: 20 Mexican Americans, 20 Blacks, and 20 Whites. Subjects who were presented with validated counselor photographs representing the three ethnicities, then assumed both administrative and personal problem situations and made counselor selections. Significant differences were found in student preference for Mexican American, Black, and White counselors for both problem situations. When provided a choice Mexican American, Black, and White students tended to prefer a counselor of their same ethnicity. In general, students also wanted to speak with a counselor of their same ethnicity more for the personal than the administrative problem situations. The results clearly support the view that counselor ethnicity is perceived by students as a significant variable in counselor selection.

Minority Counselors: Are They Really Needed?

Administrators and counselors have continuously debated the question as to the importance of having an ethnic mix of counselors on their staffs coinciding with the ethnic mix of the student population. One position is that regardless of his ethnicity a counselor can, with some difficulty, relate to and serve all students (Backner, 1970; Carkhuff, 1972; Cimbolic, 1972; Lynch, 1972; Walker, 1970; Vontress, 1969). Another position is that students need counselors with backgrounds and experiences similar to their own (Banks, 1972; Burrell & Rayder, 1971; Grantham, 1973; Harrison, 1973; Heffernon & Bruehl, 1971; Jackson & Kirchner, 1973; Stranges & Riccio, 1970).

Few research inquiries have focused on the community junior college student in respect to initial counselor preference and no empirical research could be located on the Mexican American student. The purpose of this investigation was to determine if male community junior college students, who differed in ethnicity, also differed in their initially stated preference for Mexican American, Black, and White counselors when presented with two problem situations: administrative and personal.

Subjects

The target population included all male students of a medium sized community junior college (over 4,000 students) located in a metropolitan city of the Southwest. The ethnic mix of the college was approximately 45% Mexican American, 35% Black and 20% White. A stratified random sample of 60 students was chosen with 20 students representing each of the ethnic strata. Race of the student was determined by college records and verified by the student's own racial identification. Sixty percent of the

subjects were day and 40% evening students. Seventy-two percent were between 18 and 35 years of age and 85% were veterans. Of the students initially invited the participation rate was 96.7%.

Procedures

Six male photographs depicting individuals designated as professional counselors were used in this investigation. The photographs were validated as to their representativeness of the ethnicity specified (Mexican American, Black, and White) by four college student judges of the three races with 100% inter-judge agreement. To examine counselor selection based on ethnicity and not photographic attractiveness, two counselor photographs from each ethnic group were used. To further neutralize selection cues, all photographs were (a) in black and white composition, (b) non-smiling full face presentations, (c) with the counselors wearing the same shirt and tie, (d) with approximately equal hair length and (e) with identical photographic background detail. The photos were randomly arranged into eight sets by pair comparisons. Each set had one photographed counselor representing each of the ethnic groups. Each of the photographed counselors was unknown to the subjects. Table 1 shows the arrangements of the photographs presented.

(Insert Table 1)

The subjects were asked to read the following instructions and make their counselor selections.

> Assume that you are a student with a problem that you cannot solve yourself. You decide to get some help from one of the professional counselors presented. Please select the one counselor you would want to talk with from each set of counselors presented

for situation one and situation two.

Situation one You have a problem that requires dealing with the college administration. An example might be: whom do I contact and what are the procedures in getting a financial loan of $1,000?

Situation two You have a personal problem that you want to talk about. An example might be a conflict with your parents, girlfriend, or marriage partner.

Each subject was individually shown the eight sets of counselor photos and made his eight selections for situation one. The same procedure was then repeated for situation two. A subject's level of preference for a counselor of a particular ethnic group was the number of times he chose such a counselor.

Results

The three ethnic group means were tabulated and analyses of variance were run for both the administrative and personal problem situations. The dependent variables were preference for a Mexican American, a Black, and a White counselor by each of the student ethnic groups.

Comparison of student preference means for Mexican American, Black, and White counselors were all significant for the administrative situation (Table 2). Examination of group means by the conservative Scheffe's test indicated that (a) Mexican American students had a significantly higher mean preference rating to see a Mexican American counselor than did Black or White student, (b) Black students had a significantly higher mean preference rating to see a Black counselor than did Mexican American students but not when compared with White students, and (c) White students tended to

prefer a White counselor to a greater degree than Mexican Americans ($p < .10$) and Blacks ($p < .07$), but these differences were not significant at the alpha level set.

(Insert Table 2)

A comparison of Mexican American, Black, and White student means for the personal situation showed significant differences in counselor preferences (Table 3). The results indicated that (a) Mexican American students, when compared with Whites, reported a significantly higher mean preference for the Mexican American counselor but not when compared with Black students ($p < .16$), (b) Black students demonstrated a significantly higher mean preference for the Black counselor than did Mexican American or White students, and (c) White students clearly preferred the White counselor more than Black students, and tended toward a significant difference ($p < .09$) when compared with Mexican American students.

(Insert Table 3)

Separating the two problem situations to examine if student preference for a counselor of their same race differed by problem, it was found that on the administrative situation the Mexican American student had a significantly higher mean preference for a counselor of his race than did Black or White students. No significant differences between groups were found for the personal situation as all three groups reported high mean preferences for a counselor of their same ethnicity. Examination of the means in Table 4 reveal that the Mexican American student recorded the highest mean preference on both situations for a counselor of his same race, while Black and White students had markedly higher mean ratings on the personal versus the ad-

ministrative situations. It seemed the Mexican American students, regardless of the problem, wanted to speak with a counselor of their race, while Black and White students showed a stronger racial preference when confronted with a personal problem than an administrative.

(Insert Table 4)

Discussion and Conclusions

The results of this investigation support the view that counselor race is viewed by male junior college students as a significant variable in counselor selection. This was especially true for Mexican American and Black students. White students also expressed a preference for a counselor of their race when faced with a personal problem but not significantly for the administrative problem. As might be expected, students in general, wanted to speak with a counselor of their same race more for the personal than the administrative situations. Although this was quite clear for Blacks and Whites, the Mexican American student chose a counselor of his race despite the type of problem.

The literature has a fair amount of empirical data concerning minority student counselor preference, especially for Blacks. No research could be located on the Mexican American student's preference. This is a sad testimonial when one considers that the Mexican American is the second largest minority in this country. Of the three different student ethnicities in this study, the Mexican American student had the strongest preference ratings for a counselor of his cultural identification. Since there seems to be a critical shortage of qualified Mexican American and Black counselors, the immediate implication is to begin employing greater numbers of paraprofessionals from these two ethnic groups. In addition, counselor training

programs need to further intensify the search for Mexican American and Black students.

Previous counselor preference research has almost exclusively dealt with four year institutions of higher education or the public school systems. Certainly, of the various institutional levels of higher education, the community college proportionately enrolls the preponderance of minority students. The application of these findings are particularly relevant to the community junior college setting.

It must be restated, that the study was not designed to assess counselor skills and abilities in dealing with counselees of other ethnic origins. The focus of this inquiry was on student perceptual choice regarding counselor ethnicity prior to counselor contact. In other words the potential minority walk in client. The results appear to indicate that minority students desirous of and in need of professional counseling may well be avoiding counseling centers and/or school counselors because of a feeling that counselors from backgrounds other than their own cannot understand. Finally, the results of this inquiry support an affirmative response, from the minority student's point of view, to the question posed by the title: Minority Counselors: Are They Really Needed?

TABLE 1

ARRANGEMENT OF PHOTOGRAPHS PRESENTED

Set	Counselor #1	Counselor #2	Counselor #3
1	B #1	W #1	MA #1
2	W #1	B #1	MA #2
3	W #2	B #1	MA #1
4	W #2	B #1	MA #2
5	B #2	W #1	MA #1
6	B #2	MA #2	W #1
7	B #2	W #2	MA #1
8	MA #2	B #2	W #2

Note: MA = Mexican American, B = Black, and W = White

TABLE 2

Analysis of Variance for Student Counselor

Preference for the Administrative Situation

Counselor	Students	$\bar{X}$	F	Scheffé p values		
				MA vs. B	MA vs. W	B vs. W
MA	MA	4.800	6.940**	.016	.005	.300
	B	2.900				
	W	2.600				
B	MA	0.850	7.721***	.001	.152	.152
	B	2.850				
	W	1.850				
W	MA	2.350	3.404*	.984	.103	.070
	B	2.250				
	W	3.550				

df = 1/59

* = $p < .05$

** = $p < .01$

*** = $p < .001$

TABLE 3

Analysis of Variance for Student Counselor

Preference for the Personal Situation

Counselor	Students	$\bar{X}$	F	Scheffé p values		
				MA vs. B	MA vs. W	B v
MA	MA	4.750	4.538*	.161	.016	.5
	B	3.250				
	W	2.450				
B	MA	0.800	8.797**	.001	.502	.(
	B	3.200				
	W	1.500				
W	MA	2.450	6.199*	.534	.091	.(
	B	1.550				
	W	4.050				

df = 1/59

* = $p < .01$

** = $p < .001$

TABLE 4

Analysis of Variance for Student Preference for a Counselor of the Same Ethnicity by Problem Situation

Problem	Students	$\bar{X}$	F	P
Administrative	MA	4.800	4.368	0.017*
	B	2.850		
	W	3.550		
Personal	MA	4.750	1.735	0.183
	B	3.200		
	W	4.050		

df = 1/59

* = $p < .02$

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